

# **The First Energy President** (NYTimes)

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN, Op-Ed Columnist, January 5, 2007

Now that President Gerald Ford has been buried with all the honors he deserved, it is time to discuss a proper memorial. I would suggest the Gerald Ford Energy Independence Act.

Few people remember today, but "Gerald Ford was the first U.S. president to really use the levers of the presidency to try to break our addiction to oil," said the energy economist Philip Verleger Jr. "He was way ahead of his time."

Well, his time has come again - and then some.

The greatest thing George Bush could do - for President Ford's legacy and his own - would be to dedicate his coming State of the Union address to completing the energy independence agenda that Mr. Ford initiated 32 years ago in the wake of the 1973 Arab oil embargo and energy shock.

As the page titled "Energy" from the Ford presidential library Web site reminds us: "Early in his administration, President Ford said that he would not sit by and watch the nation continue to talk about an energy crisis and do nothing about it. Nor, he said, would he accept halfway measures which failed to change the direction that has made our nation so vulnerable to foreign economic interests. The president proposed firm but necessary measures designed to achieve energy independence for the U.S. by 1985, and to regain our position of world leadership in energy."

In his 1975 State of the Union speech, President Ford laid out his vision: "I have a very deep belief in America's capabilities. Within the next 10 years, my program envisions: 200 major nuclear power plants; 250 major new coal mines; 150 major coal-fired power plants; 30 major new [oil] refineries; 20 major new synthetic fuel plants; the drilling of many thousands of new oil wells; the insulation of 18 million homes; and the manufacturing and the sale of millions of new automobiles, trucks and buses that use much less fuel. ... In another crisis - the one in 1942 - President Franklin D. Roosevelt said this country would build 60,000 military aircraft. By 1943, production in that program had reached 125,000 aircraft annually. They did it then. We can do it now."

Obviously, President Ford's emphasis on coal and domestic oil came in age when most people were unaware of climate change. Still, Mr. Ford wasn't just all talk on energy. He used his presidential powers to impose a \$3-a-barrel fee on imported oil to reduce consumption. That was a big deal, noted Mr. Verleger, because the average cost of imported crude at the time was only \$10.76 a barrel.

Yes, you read that right. A Republican president actually imposed an import fee on oil to curb consumption! Yes, President Bush, it can be done! The republic survived!

Thanks to the Energy Policy Conservation Act of 1975 and other measures, Mr. Ford's energy legacy includes: the creation of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve for use in an emergency; the phasing out of domestic price controls on oil to encourage more exploration; major investment in alternative energy research; assistance to states in developing energy conservation programs; and, most important, the creation of the first compulsory mileage standards for U.S. automobiles.

Those mileage standards have barely been tightened since 1975 - because some idiotic congressmen from Michigan, who thought they were protecting Detroit, have blocked efforts to raise them. So, Japanese automakers innovated more in that area, and the rest is history - or in the case of Detroit, obituary.

Every 10 years we say to ourselves, "If only we had done the right thing 10 years ago." Well, President Bush has a chance in his State of the Union to call on Americans to honor Mr. Ford by completing his vision. But it means asking Americans to do some hard things: accepting a gasoline or carbon tax; inducing Detroit to make more fuel-efficient cars, trucks and plug-in hybrids; setting a national requirement for utilities to provide 20 percent of their electricity from renewable wind, solar, hydro or nuclear power by 2015; and, finally, making large-scale investments in mass transit.

It is stunning that since 9/11 the Bush team has never mounted a campaign to get Americans to conserve energy.

"Ford called for zero oil imports by 1985," said Mr. Verleger. "Instead, we imported five million barrels a day then. In 2006, imports will average almost 14 million barrels a day. Had we achieved everything Ford proposed, the price of oil today would be \$20 a barrel, not \$60, the polar ice caps might not be melting, the polar bear might still have a chance, and our children would have a future."